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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the setting and history of campus unrest in one California school district which led to the evolution of a new program of interventions. In the period since its introduction, unrest has been settled with a minimum of school disruption and a growing spirit of cooperation and understanding among students, parents, and school staff. That the program is of real value in and of itself is indicated in its use in other school districts. The history of the school's unrest is described, followed by a detailed problem analysis of the program and solution strategies. Also presented is a discussion of positive preventive interventions from the behavioral sciences. The authors conclude that within this case report, the behavioral sciences, especially communication theory and technique, have demonstrated utility in racial and campus unrest. In addition, it was shown that the communications network offers an important alternative to authoritarian forces. (Author/BW)

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CAMPUS UNREST AND ITS RESOLUTION IN SCHOOLS OF CHANGING ETHNIC COMPOSITION

Oyler, Robert H., Zimmerman, Irla Lee, and Holly, Keith A.

ABSTRACT

The development of a new communications approach to high school campus unrest is discussed in terms of history, initiating crisis, and ultimate resolution. The approach itself is described, and its application in different settings is annotated.

INTRODUCTION

Campus unrest has been the hallmark of the last ten years. Repeated riots and school closing have been described (Mottola, 1971, and others). The following paper describes the setting and history of campus unrest in one California school district which led to the evolution of a new program of interventions. In the period since its introduction, unrest has been settled with a minimum of school disruption, and a growing spirit of cooperation and understanding among students, parents, and school staff. That the program is of real value in and of itself is indicated in its use in other school districts.

HISTORY

The school district described has had a history of high school campus unrest which closely paralleled the changing racial and cultural composition of the community. In a relatively short period of time, large numbers of Mexican-Americans and Blacks had moved in and some Whites had moved out of the district. In 1965, the first of several seemingly "minor" incidents occurred which had definite racial overtones. Typically the early incidents took place in the restrooms, and involved illegal extortion of money. The first significant "race riot" in April, 1966, started in the school cafeteria when one of a group of White boys threw a book which hit a Black boy. The Black boy, returning it in kind, hit a White girl. From that beginning, one student was hospitalized, and the County Sheriff's Deputies and Highway Patrol were called in to break up the melee. In

CG 007 543

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the next four and a half years, there were several major riots and numerous minor incidents.

The external "causes" of these racial incidents were described by the participants as follows: name calling; unequal treatment of students by school officials; threats of intimidation and extortion; attempts to inaugurate a Black Student Union (BBU) by Blacks; attempts to establish a program for two minority studies (at the high school level); and unequal distribution of federal educational funds within the school district to multi-racial but not to all-White schools.

A new community crisis was precipitated in September 1970, with the scheduled opening of two innovative Middle Schools for grades 5 to 8 in lieu of Junior Highs for grades 7 and 8. The establishment of such schools meant that children faced an earlier change from neighborhood to central and hence integrated schools. This projected change led to a recall election against all board members favoring the Middle School Plan. Even though the recall election was not successful, the vote was close, and inevitable highlighted the polarization of the community on an educational topic that was seen by many to be racially based.

A month after the recall election, following an exciting football game in which the High School team lost by a close margin to one from an affluent White school, tempers flared between one Black and one White player on the local team. The grudge between the players smolders and spread over the weekend. Monday at school, rumors flew concerning suspension from school and from the team of the two players involved in the locker room fight. Suspicion and resentment were followed by a simultaneous eruption of about 100 small fights across campus. The next day, the White students united into a "Caucus", claiming they would not go to class until something was done to make it safe for them. Many, but by no means

all, of the Black students and some protective Black parents gathered and said practically the same thing and "boycotted" the district's schools.

The Administration offered students the option of going to regular class or attending separate meetings of Black, White, or Mexican-American students in separate sections of the high school. In each group, students were encouraged to express their opinions and select five spokesmen. Faculty and parents had mixed reactions to these meetings, ranging from appreciation of "democracy in action" or "evolving leadership" to fear of students "ranting and raving and destroying morale and property." The student gathering prompted other meetings of the faculty and a mass meeting of the community adults that evening. The faculty was both self-critical and critical of the police; the community speakers were vehemently critical of the district administration and of high school education in general.

On the basis of the above meetings and those with spokesmen which followed, a number of significant points of problem definition could be identified. One was the large number of rumors arising in all parts of the community, and their marked similarity from one area to another. Another point was the difficulty in quickly disseminating reassuring and factual information, particularly in answer to the more virulent rumors. A third was the high school faculty's tendency to split on the proper approach to school problems, varying from an extreme of withdrawal from the "anarchy" to the espousal of a democratic approach. Finally, certain parents and students spontaneously behaved like "natural" or "emergent" leaders but had not been included among the elected or "established" leaders of the part but were highly respected and influential.

From the above points, three strategies were clearly vital in the resolution of school problems: First, students able to communicate with their peers

were saught to help control rumors on campus. Second, a volunteer and multi-racial community adult group was activated to provide anxious parents with information. Third, a course was offered to parents which taught communication skills and techniques for resolving typical family conflicts effectively. In other words, all three approaches sought to resolve problems in communication between student and school, parent and school, and parent and child. This "Communications Network" was combined with stricter, fairer, and more immediate discipline on campus.

DETAILED PROBLEM ANALYSIS AND SOLUTION STRATEGIES

Dualistic application of behavioral science and firm, clear disciplinary limits in the following two years is credited with the fact that there has been no major disturbance or "riot" for 20 months, in spite of some eleven "incidents" each of which could have erupted into a major "riot." Nearby schools in other cities have had a corresponding period of riots, of police on campus, of injuries, of school closings, and of staff resignations.

James H. Laue of the Community Relations Offices of the U.S. Department of Justice has hypothesized seven stages in the confrontations which may be labeled "riots."* These are:

challenge
surfacing of conflict
precipitation of a crisis
confrontation
communication
compromise
change

In this Southern California district's attempts to control and interpret campus unrest, the Communication or interventions developed center at the "confrontation level" of Laue's model. The application of Laue's model to this social history follows; note conceptual states in left hand margins.

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* R.R. Hansel, Like Father, Like Son-Like Hell!, 1969, pp.77-79.

Challenge

In September, 1970, the scheduled opening of two innovative Middle Schools for grades 5 to 8 led to the most recent community crisis. The establishment of Middle Schools meant that children faced an earlier change from neighborhood to

Conflict

integrated schooling, and this projected change led to a recall election against all five board members favoring the Middle School Plan. Even though that recall election was not successful, the vote was close and highlighted and polarization of the community on an educational topic that was seen by many to be racially based.

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Crisis

tempers flared between several Black and White players on the local team. The grudge between football players smoldered over the weekend. Monday at school, rumors flew concerning suspension from school and concerning suspension from the team of the two players involved in the locker room fight. Suspension and

Confrontation

resentment were followed by a sudden outbreak of small fights all across campus (about 100). The next day, the White students united into a "Caucus" and said they would not go to class until something was done to make it safe for them. Many, but not all Black students and some protective Black parents gathered and said practically the same thing. At this point, the Administration offered

Communication

students the option of going to regular class or attending separate meetings of Black, White, or Mexican-American students in separate sections of the high school. In each racial group, students were encouraged to express their opinions. Faculty and parents had mixed reactions ranging from appreciation of "democracy in action" and evolving leadership to fear of students "ranting and raving and destroying morale and property." The student meetings prompted other meetings of the faculty and a mass meeting of the community adults that evening. The faculty was self-critical and critical of police; the community speakers were vehemently critical

of high school education and district administration.

From the above incident, a new dualistic approach to campus unrest has been developed: "The Communications Network" combined with stricter, fair, immediate discipline. (See diagram and components on the following pages.)

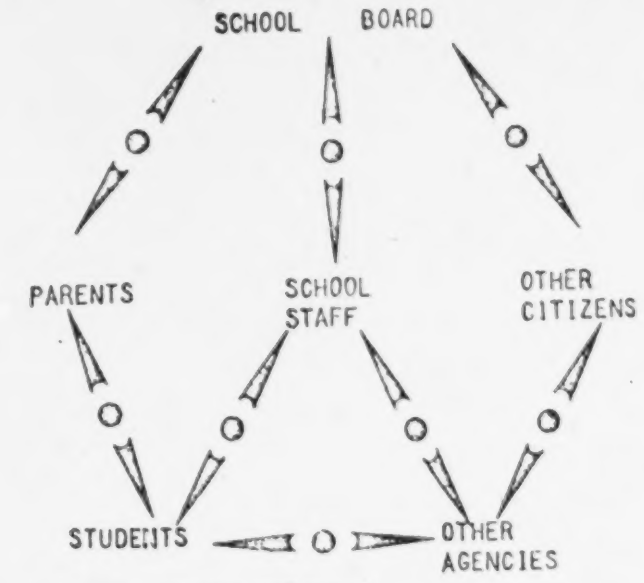
POSITIVE PREVENTIVE INTERVENTIONS FROM THE BEHAVIOR SCIENCES

To restore order and safety so students could come back to school and so constructive change could be made, the following steps were planned and carried out:

*Student Communicators: Emergent student leaders were selected to be trained during school hours and to serve as "student communicators" or discussion leaders who could clarify and combat rumors during "incidents" or periods of high tension. This approach arose from the group meetings where peers, parents and certain students themselves noticed surprisingly effective "crisis leadership qualities" in others. Approximately fifty student Communicators participated in communicator training sessions conducted by two school psychologists. These training sessions utilized some concepts developed by Dr. Thomas Gordon. At the end of the week, those who successfully completed the training and were willing to sign the communicator's oath (see Fig. 4 on page 8), became an accredited Communicator. From the communicator group, a decision-making "council" of six Communicators (1 Black male and 1 Black female; 1 Mexican-American male and 1 Mexican-American female; 1 White male and 1 White female) were elected to initially discuss any significant rumors

(TEXT CONTINUES ON PAGE 8)

COMMUNICATIONS NETWORK



PARENT OBSERVERS ON CAMPUS (PLUS CAMPUS PROCTORS)

STUDENT COMMUNICATORS (HUMAN CONTROL)

PARENT-DISCUSSION GROUP (MULTIRACIAL)

COMMUNITY EDUCATION COUNCIL (MULTIRACIAL ADVISORS TO SCHOOL BOARD)

REVIEW PANEL (GRIEVANCES)

"HOT LINE" & "TELEPHONE TREE" (FOR ANXIOUS PARENTS)

HUMAN RELATIONS CLASSES (ELEMENTARY & MIDDLE SCHOOL)

PARENT EFFECTIVENESS TRAINING (COMMUNICATION)

PRINCIPAL'S OPEN FORUM (TWICE MONTHLY)

Fig. 1

A CONTEXT FOR A COMMUNICATIONS NETWORK

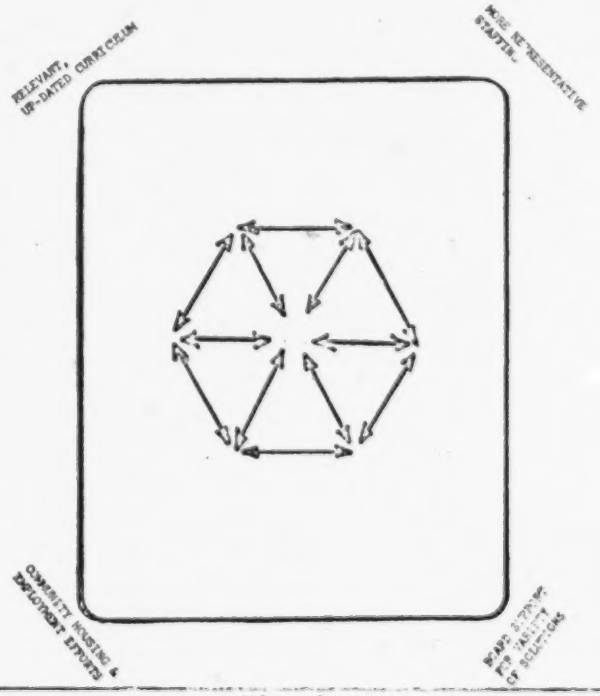


Fig. 2

SOME NON-POLITICAL MISSIONS & GOALS
OF A COMMUNICATIONS NETWORK

MISSIONS:
1. REPLACE FEAR WITH HOPE IN HIGH SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY.
2. KEEP SCHOOLS OPEN FOR LEARNING.

GOALS:
1. DEFINING PROBLEMS ACCURATELY -- FACT OR RUMOR?
2. RECOGNIZING INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES AND REDUCING STEREOTYPES.
3. IMPROVING SKILLS IN LEADING GROUP DISCUSSIONS.
4. ENRICHING HUMAN COMMUNICATION BETWEEN INDIVIDUALS.
5. STRENGTHENING SCHOOL STAFF BY STUDENT AND PARENT INVOLVEMENT.

Fig. 3

on the campus with the administrators. During times of crisis on the high school campus, the following procedures are used:

As a Communicator at Duarte High School I realize that I must attempt to put aside my own membership in any one ethnic or racial group in order to work for peace, order and for the common good of all students. I will always try to postpone any action or judgement on any issues until I have attempted to gather all important facts and information. I will think carefully before I talk and act.

Fig. 4

1. The Communicator Council meet with the school Principal and the parties involved in the rumors or incidents.

2. If an incident is judged to be of significant magnitude or has inflamatory potential, then all Communicators will be called to a special meeting.

3. A discussion of the incidents takes place directly with the top administrators and the parties involved.

4. All Communicators wearing their Communicator Badges and using their Communicator I.D. Card go to the two classes pre-assigned to them and lead an informal discussion with the students in the classes. Teachers actively support the Communicators by enforcing classroom usual limits and rules.

5. After the classroom discussions, all Communicators report back for a second special meeting to discuss the rumors and new information that was gathered in the class meetings.

6. If necessary, the Communicators will, on some occasions, return to the classes for a second time with new and significant information or will make themselves available to answer questions of students on campus.

The student Communicators served a variety of roles in controlling rumors, in guaranteeing the students a direct line to the "factual information", in modeling responses to crises which were reasonable and effective, in meeting with authorities on an accepted and equal basis, etc. The High School came to be perceived by students as "our high-school."

*Community Hot Line: A volunteer community adult group was established in the community in 1969 to perform some of the same functions as the student Communicators. The Hot Line provided anxious parents with information concerning incidents or rumors of incidents happening in the school or community. The "telephone tree" operated by the Hot Line could assist parents or students during a crisis in getting direct information from or to school administrators, teachers, student leaders, and community leaders when other avenues of communication were closed to them.

*Parent Effectiveness Training (P.E.T.): A course offered to parents by teaching them skills to assist in handling typical family problems effectively and in communicating their feelings and values to children more effectively. After the 8 weeks course, the parents have reported fewer tantrums, emotional flareups, fights, and power struggles. They have indicated that there is better two-way communication, more sharing of feelings, and closer relationships among family members.

Other significant parts of "Communication Network" operating in the school district to relieve racial tension and lessen the chances for campus disruptions include: parent observers on campus, multi-racial parent discussion groups, human relations classes for all school staff members, and a "standing" multi-racial advisory group to the School Board called the "Community Education Council." In addition, the high school operates a review panel which reviews student grievances and a bi-monthly "Principal's Forum" to improve communication between students and the administration.

Since October, 1970, there have been no major disturbance or riots. There have been many occasions when tension has mounted between the three major ethnic groups on campus. On one such occasion in November, 1971, a Black 13 year old boy allegedly hung himself in a jail cell after he was arrested for shoplifting. Many in both cities in the Black communities felt he was choked to death by a White police officer. Although the victim was not a student in the local schools, his girl friend and other friends attended the local school. Rumors were rampant in the communities for several weeks. A rash of fire bombings causing an estimated $80,000 to businesses and homes occurred in the neighboring community. During these disturbances, sixteen members of the National Socialist White Peoples Party,

clad in full Nazi uniform were arrested on suspicion of disturbing the peace and conducting an assembly in a public place without a permit "next door." The schools in the neighboring city were closed for two and one-half days, while the schools in the local district were able to open without any major incidents by use of the "Communications Network." Many observers felt the major differences between the two situations could be attributed to the positive involvement and concern demonstrated by the local students, parents and school personnel.

CONCLUSION:

It is the authors' contention that within this case report the behavioral sciences, especially communication theory and technique, have demonstrated utility in racial and campus unrest. The "communications" network may implement the deepest, effective portions of past "human relations" efforts and does offer an important alternative to authoritarian force from inside or outside the school. It should be noted that (1) the Administrator trusted students and parents when he admitted openly, "I can't do it by myself" (2) information is quickly gathered and disseminated, not withheld (3) issues are sharpened or defined, not hidden or ignored (4) students learn transferable social skills (5) estimated cost per month per High School was under $350.

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